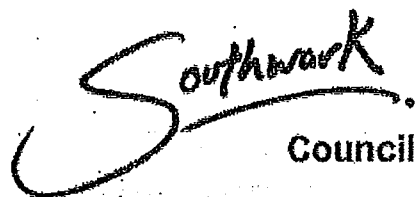


Inquiry into
The London Borough of Southwark (Aylesbury Estate Wolverton 1-59) (No 2)
Compulsory Purchase Order 2012

Proof of evidence of Ms Jacqueline Fearon Aylesbury Area Manager

For the London Borough of Southwark

The logo for Southwark Council, featuring the word "Southwark" in a stylized, cursive font with a large, sweeping underline that extends to the left. Below the word "Southwark" is the word "Council" in a simple, sans-serif font.

1. Qualifications and Experience

- 1.1 I am the Aylesbury Area Manager within Housing Services Division of the Housing & Community Services Department.
- 1.2 I have worked for Southwark Council since 1 February 2012. I have worked in the field of Housing, Asset Management and Community Development in excess of 20 years. Prior to joining Southwark Council I worked for Estuary Housing Association as the Director of Housing Operations.
- 1.3 In my role as Aylesbury Area Manager, I am responsible for the delivery of housing and environmental services to the residents of the Aylesbury Estate and delivery of an intensive rehousing and case management service that ensures households on the Aylesbury are rehoused. We are working closely with the regeneration team to deliver vacant possession as part of the regeneration of the estate.
- 1.4 I also manage a team of 15 staff that consists of Neighbourhood Officers and Managers, technical and customer services staff.

2 Scope of evidence

- 2.1 My evidence is separated into two parts. The first section demonstrates how the tenants of 1-59 Wolverton, Aylesbury Estate, London SE17 (the Order Land) have been supported by council officers to find new homes through a variety of routes both in the period prior to Southwark Council seeking a Compulsory Purchase Order and throughout the current CPO process.
- 2.2 The second section of my evidence also demonstrates the challenges that are being faced when managing an estate, and delivering services where the infrastructure of many of the buildings are at the end of their useful life and require an excessive amount of investment to bring them up to current standards and good practice. The design layout of the estate and the blocks within them also represent features that present major management challenges, and exacerbate opportunities for anti social behaviour (ASB), rough sleeping and crime amongst other things.

2.3 My evidence and that of Mark Maginn describes the steps taken by the Council to secure vacant possession of the Order Land by agreement within the Council's policies for rehousing and without the need for the use of the Council's CPO powers. My evidence sets out the actions taken specifically with respect to the rehousing of tenants and Mr Maginn describes the support given to leaseholders.

3 Background

3.1 The Aylesbury Estate was constructed between 1966 and 1977. The estate was home to over 7500 people and also encompasses schools, offices and community buildings. The dwellings on the estate are mostly grouped in slab blocks of up to 14 storeys in height, with some of an immense length in close proximity or adjoining to the Wolverton block.

3.2 Much of the housing stock in Southwark is of poor quality and is ageing fast, and the Aylesbury estate represents a disproportionate amount of this sort of stock. The blocks on the estate are proving increasingly uneconomic, difficult to manage and there is an increasing reluctance for new households to make a property on the estate their housing of choice. There are no quick remedies and increasing levels of investment would be needed to keep the housing on the estate at an acceptable standard.

3.3 The Council has an indicative re-housing plan for the tenants living on the Aylesbury estate. This plan outlines the timetable for each block being emptied and demolished. It includes details of when referencing and re-housing for residents will begin for each tenant.

3.4 The Order Land includes 41 properties that have been previously let to secure tenants. As at 7 March 2013, there is one secure tenant left. This tenant has viewed and accepted a suitable property on 28 February 2013. The tenancy commencement date is the 11th March 2013. A timetable for the tenant to move off the Order Land has been drawn up and they will provide vacant possession on the 14th March 2013. The property will then be made secure by welding to prevent any access via doors or windows.

- 3.5 During the re-housing process, as tenants and leaseholders have moved out, their properties have either been sealed up and taken out of commission or used for temporary accommodation (depending on the condition of the properties). The Council has a duty under the Housing Act 1996 to provide temporary accommodation. Tenants of temporary accommodation occupy on short term non-secure tenancies and ensure the sustainability and security of the blocks in the short term. There are now no temporary accommodation tenants remaining in the Order Land.
- 3.6 The re-housing options available to tenants are to move to private accommodation, a housing association property or a Council property within the borough or to register with landlords that operate an out of London rehousing scheme.
- 3.7 The process of re-housing tenants from site 7 (1-59 Wolverton) began in 2009 in the form of the Aylesbury Regeneration Sub Group. This consisted of members of the Housing services and Regeneration teams.

4 **Re-housing assistance**

- 4.1 The Council has established a dedicated Aylesbury Neighbourhood Management and Housing Team whose aim is specifically to support residents through the re-housing process.
- 4.2 To help with this process the Council's Neighbourhood Officers ("NOs") are there to assist tenants in moving to a property that will best meet their needs and the NOs visit every tenant and carry out an assessment. Each block is allocated a dedicated NO, to provide end to end support and guidance to Aylesbury tenants through the regeneration process.
- 4.3 Assistance is offered both in applying for private accommodation, bidding for a housing association or a Council property through the Council's choice based letting system 'Homesearch', or being nominated to a new build housing association property. Mark Maginn's evidence also refers to 'Homesearch' in more detail.
- 4.4 Support is offered through regular home visits and a neighbourhood office where tenants are able to visit and work with officers to secure suitable accommodation. This includes assistance with bidding on a computer,

browsing of websites, signposting to other landlords, benefits advice and accompanied viewings if requested.

- 4.5 The purpose of the first home visit is to allow officers to make an initial assessment of housing needs, and to give tenants the opportunity to ask questions about the process of moving and the re-housing options available. During the visit the NOs will fill in a housing referencing questionnaire; this will include basic information regarding the family size and housing needs of the tenant, which their application will be based on.
- 4.6 The NOs also provide advice on schools and health facilities in the area that tenants are moving to, as the majority of tenants in the first phase have moved off the estate. The evidence of Mark Maginn explains in more detail how the Homesearch system operates. Tenants being moved from their homes as a result of regeneration programmes such as the Aylesbury Estate are placed in Band 1. This status gives bidders the highest priority when bidding for properties against other Homesearch users and therefore more chance of being successful.
- 4.7 The NOs also keep tenants up to date on their individual moving process, work with other Council teams to help keep the estate safe and tackle anti-social behaviour throughout the regeneration process.
- 4.8 Aylesbury tenants living in the Order Land have also had the option of moving to a number of housing association new build sites where properties meeting their requirements are available to let.
- 4.9 All tenants moving as a result of the regeneration proposals benefit from the payment of statutory home loss payments of £4,700 which is a standard fee paid to cover the investment that households have made in their homes over the years. In addition, the Council also provides assistance through a disturbance allowance to cover the reasonable costs associated with moving home, such as removal fees.
- 4.10 If a tenant is interested in sheltered accommodation, the Council will make an assessment of the tenant's needs, and if found to be eligible, can be considered for one of the existing sheltered accommodation schemes in the borough.

- 4.11 If the tenant is unsuccessful in bidding on Homesearch, the Council may seek to make a direct offer. This means a property will be allocated to meet the tenant's housing needs as assessed at the point of registration. However if the tenant does not accept the direct offer, the re-housing process may, in some cases, need to be enforced using legal proceedings. However, this would only occur after the Council has made a reasonable offer of alternative accommodation taking into account the needs of the tenants concerned.

5 Current position on re-housing tenants

- 5.1 Since the re-housing process began in 2009 40 out of 41 tenant households have been successfully re-housed, either in Council properties, RSL properties or elsewhere.
- 5.2 One secure tenant remains living in 1-59 Wolverton. The current position is that the tenant has accepted the offer of another property elsewhere in the borough and will move off the Order Land shortly. This tenant has viewed and accepted a suitable property on 28 February 2013. The tenancy commencement date is the 11th March 2013. A timetable for the tenant to move off the Order Land has been drawn up and they will provide vacant possession on the 14th March 2013.

6 Challenges of managing the Aylesbury Estate and low occupancy blocks

- 6.1 **Management Costs** – The staffing resources referred to in 4.1 are also responsible for the provision of standard housing management, regeneration and technical services exclusively to the residents of the Aylesbury estate.
- 6.2 This is a position that is unique across the borough, and is provided in recognition of the significant challenges that are faced by those living on and managing the estate, as it progresses through the regeneration cycle with a failing infrastructure. There are extra and significant costs of having twice as many staffing resources for Aylesbury compared to the rest of the borough.
- 6.3 As a result of the challenges faced, Aylesbury housing officer areas of management responsibility, their "patch" size, consists of approx 350

properties per officer. This is half the size of the areas managed by housing officers working in the rest of the borough. Also working closely with the team is a dedicated tier of specialist managers plus input from the Council's community development partners at the Creation Trust. In addition to this dedicated team, central teams at Tooley Street also provide additional support in terms of finance, resident involvement, anti social behaviour, asset management etc, all of which is on a more intense and smaller property to officer ratios than elsewhere in the Council.

- 6.4 The housing team is responsible for ensuring that services and customer focus is continually improved, and resident survey responses indicate that there is a largely positive view of how the estate is being managed despite the problems experienced. This would not be possible without the high levels of staff input that is required to address the challenges presented and is unlikely to be unsustainable in the longer term if the estate were not subject to the regeneration plans. There would also be additional and increased management costs to tenants and leaseholders to reflect the staffing levels needed to sustain the management of the estate.
- 6.5 Residents are regularly consulted and involved in the delivery of services by the housing team on the estate, and are aware that elsewhere in the borough there has been a move to closing local offices and centralising housing services staff. Residents are clear that the Aylesbury retains its unique staffing structure and dedicated staff team and office as a direct result of the regeneration and Southwark's commitment to assist residents to take the journey they have previously chosen.
- 6.6 If the regeneration did not progress it is likely that a review of the staffing and office structures would be undertaken so that the estate would be brought in line with the management structures that are operating in the rest of the borough.
- 6.7 **Estate Management** - A combination of the estate being regenerated leading to a number of boarded up properties, and the poor design has lead to an increase in instances of rough sleeping, drug dealing, robbery and sexually motivated crimes e.g. exposure.

- 6.8 The existing "dead areas" facilitated by the design of the estate and the increasing number of spaces that are being created as a result of the rehousing process are resulting in a number of management challenges including; dead areas become public toilets, graffiti 'art' becoming a significant problem in some blocks and an increased need for warden, housing officer and police patrols to monitor the blocks as the population decreases and the misuse of the block increases.
- 6.9 Empty homes have been broken into and vandalised or squatted. This significantly increases the risk of unknown individuals of exposure to asbestos, and there is an increased fire risk as live service pipes are broken and the resulting flooding of properties can find electrical services as well as damaging surrounding properties. There has been a considerable expense incurred as all empty properties that are not in use are being 'welded' to minimise the risk of break ins, squatting or metal theft.
- 6.10 Due to the design of the services for all residents, services such as water, heating, mains power, TV etc need to be kept active (although capped off at individual levels) in void properties to enable the communal features of the rest of the block to function. This is a necessary but costly process as the number of residents within the blocks reduces, but full services are still needed by a decreasing number of people. This also attracts squatters and rough sleepers who are keen to benefit from these ongoing services as they mean that areas within the block are relatively warm and have access to light, thus bringing risk and nuisance to other residents.
- 6.11 Due to the failing infrastructure, leaks emanating from one property are especially difficult to trace due to the layout of properties, there are numerous possible causes for leaks and as a result multiple empty flats often need to be opened to identify the cause of water penetration. Given that they are initially sealed when void, there is an ongoing cost each time a unit is opened and closed.
- 6.12 **Communications and Public Relations** – As the blocks inevitably deteriorate each of these challenges affect the building; dissatisfaction amongst residents grows and needs to be managed. There is a significant increase in the need to update and respond to resident complaints, members' enquiries, formal complaints and legal challenges. Many of these responses

are necessary as a direct response of the estate needing regeneration and cannot be resolved immediately in some cases.

- 6.13 Surrounding areas are also affected by living next to a challenging environment and it is necessary that this managed with publicity/newsletters, increased member meetings (often at short notice) in addition to the usual routes of communication that apply across the borough.

7 Safety and Quality of Life for Residents

- 7.1 At the various feedback forums that are available residents have been reporting concerns about their safety and well being on the estate, as a direct result of its condition and design. The council is allocating considerable resources to address and allay these concerns but in the longer term, were the estate not regenerated this would increasingly result in a high cost, low to medium impact resolution. It is likely that some of these costs would have to be borne by leaseholder's e.g. additional lighting, painting, and demolition of walkways.
- 7.2 The estate has recently (12th December 2012) been part of a major police operation around drug dealing and this is a very recent demonstration that the estate has become a focal point for those not living on the estate, to enter onto it to carry out drug and other related activity including burglary and robbery.
- 7.3 This is as a direct result of the design layout of the estate including numerous walkways and entry points onto the estate, poor visibility and 'blind spots' allowing criminal behaviour, or poor opportunities for witnessing and reporting. Posters are being erected in high crime spots by community groups to warn residents of the theft of mobile phone robberies, an activity that whilst informative also leads to areas of the estate being viewed as 'no go' areas, and exacerbates fear of crime and has a further negative impact on the estates reputation. CCTV has been installed along Thurlow Street in February 2013 to further allay security fears, and further cameras are being considered.
- 7.4 The estate has many active and passionate community members and the spirit that they have nurtured is at risk as occupied properties are surrounded by welded empty homes. Tenants and Resident Association groups in some

blocks are ceasing to function because of low numbers as people move out, and rough Sleepers are attracted to doorways and stairwells of blocks where there is now low pedestrian traffic. Squatters target blocks with low occupancy and attempted metal theft that has led to numerous leaks and floods into resident's homes. Traditional and on line service providers coming to the estate e.g. Tesco, postal services, pizza etc have started to refuse to go to some of the blocks where they feel that their staff may be at risk.

8 Maintenance Costs

- 8.1 In addition to the staffing resource costs, the costs that are currently being invested in major works on the estate are not viable or sustainable in the longer term. Examples of this are patch roof renewals, partial lift upgrades, addressing drain collapses as a result of minimal maintenance and renewal, and a number of reactive but costly temporary repairs that also means services can be intermittent for some periods of time.
- 8.2 There have been several stock condition surveys carried out on homes across the borough, of which Aylesbury properties have been a part of. The surveys have found that many of the properties that have failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard (DHS) were due to 'kitchen, wiring and window related failures', all key components that are not cheap to fix and a major cause of concern for residents on the Aylesbury estate. There are also several related concerns that residents also report that are not subject to Southwark DHS works including heating, decorations and security.
- 8.3 The Aylesbury estate functions on a district heating system that was installed in the 1960's - 70's. The pipe work and plant on the estate has been subject to piecemeal repair and reactive maintenance and has exceeded its original life expectancy by at least 15 years. There are continual system breakdowns in the winter months when there is peak demand on an ageing system.
- 8.4 The fabric of services and pipe work that is installed within the blocks for the heating and hot water services are extremely difficult to access and maintain. Access hatches contain asbestos and the pipe work behind it is difficult to reach and carry out repairs. In order to remedy routine repairs to reinstate heating or hot water it has been necessary to remove baths, floors and on occasion demolish internal walls so that access and a safe repair of heating

and hot water services can be undertaken. This again increases the cost and length of repairs, as well as the inconvenience to residents. In some cases it has been necessary to place residents in high cost temporary accommodation until the repairs have been carried out.

- 8.5 Due to the high cost, the Aylesbury estate cannot accommodate modern methods of retro fitting its homes in order to extend their life. Due to the underlying problems with the structure of the estate and the ongoing high levels of investment that would be needed to maintain it is not viable to implement this approach.
- 8.3 Part of the current Council strategy is to ensure that investment is usefully targeted at those estates most in need, and Southwark has identified the Aylesbury as one of 15 estates in significant need of repair to bring the stock up to DHS and maintain it over a five year period. There are particular issues on the Aylesbury that mean within this period of investment nearly 1100 homes on the estate would move into non decency and require further additional investment to bring them up to a minimum standard, excluding the costs for dealing with other block or property infrastructure issues such as damp, improved fire safety and drainage.
- 8.4 The Council has assessed that £22.7 million would be required for immediate work to meet the current DHS across the borough, and an additional £24.3 million to address the properties that would fail the DHS within the next five years. It has been estimated that the Aylesbury would require a minimum of £8.6 million for the components listed in 8.2 alone (at an average cost of £6,6k per dwelling) excluding other essential property and infrastructure works.
- 8.5 The impact of this lack of investment means that the Aylesbury is spending significant amounts from the reactive repairs budget on carrying out responsive repairs that are a symptom, and in many instances do not address or repair the underlying problem. Southwark is currently one of the highest spenders on responsive repairs and voids costs, of which the spend on the Aylesbury estate represents a disproportionate amount. A large amount of this cost is spent on staff and contractors and does not represent a picture of improving efficiencies and costs for the residents living on the Aylesbury estate.

8.6 As a high investment need estate, the Aylesbury will continue to demand a larger share of future borough investment in its housing stock and a larger share of Council staffing resources to manage this investment process and its impact. Failing to regenerate the estate will result in it having a disproportionate and adverse effect on other residents and services on council properties across the borough, as well as having an adverse effect on the residents of the Aylesbury and the value of leasehold properties within it.

8.7 Other services integral to the maintenance, look and environmental quality of the estate are also becoming increasingly difficult and costly. This includes key services such as refuse collection where good practice and modern collection methods cannot be implemented due to the design, access and location of the blocks. Fly tipping and dumping increase as a result of this and there are additional costs being incurred as the need to remove these increases with frequency of occurrence.

9 Summary

9.1 By reason of the factors detailed in sections 6, 7 and 8 respectively, my evidence demonstrates the unique and costly challenges that are presented by the management of the Aylesbury Estate and low occupancy blocks, the limited ability to enhance and maintain the safety and quality of life for residents and the increasing and unsustainable maintenance costs. All of these factors weigh heavily in favour of regeneration which can only proceed following the confirmation of the order.

10 Conclusions

10.1 There were originally 41 tenanted properties in 1-59 Wolverton and 40 have successfully moved into new accommodation. Out of all the residents still occupying there is one secure tenant left.

10.2 The process to move residents from site 7 (1-59 Wolverton) began in 2009 and is now largely completed. It is anticipated that the remaining secure tenant will vacate their property within the next few weeks.

10.3 One of the matters the 2004 Circular (Compulsory Purchase and the Crichele Down Rules – CD4)) identifies as preparatory work that an acquiring authority should carry out before embarking on compulsory purchase, and throughout the preparation and procedural stages, is to seek to acquire land by negotiation wherever practicable (paragraph 24 2004 Circular). The Circular makes clear that the compulsory purchase of land is intended as a last resort in the event that attempts to acquire by agreement fail.

10.4 My evidence shows the steps taken by the Council to try to obtain vacant possession of the Order Land, by agreement, in order to enable regeneration to proceed, to avoid the need for a CPO.

10.5 The Council hopes that the remaining secure tenant will vacate the Order Land within the next few weeks. In proceeding with the CPO process, the Council has considered the point at which the land it seeks to acquire will be needed, and has been planning the CPO timetable as a contingency measure, at the same time as conducting negotiations with the tenants. This is in line with the requirements of the Circular, paragraph 24. The Council is of the view that this will help to make the seriousness of the authority's intentions clear, and hopes that this might encourage those whose properties are affected to enter more readily into meaningful negotiations.

